

COMMITTEE ON
**SCIENCE, SPACE, AND
TECHNOLOGY**
CHAIRMAN LAMAR SMITH



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Statement of Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas)
Is NSF Properly Managing Its Rotating Staff?

Chairman Smith: Thank you Chairman Loudermilk for holding this hearing. And I thank the witnesses for being here to share their expertise.

The National Science Foundation (NSF) plays an important part in ensuring that America remains on the cutting edge of science and a world leader in scientific research.

It is important that the Science Committee conducts robust oversight of the NSF to ensure that the American people's tax dollars are used in the nation's best interest.

This morning's hearing will focus on the NSF's use of what is referred to as the "Rotators Program."

This program allows the NSF and other science agencies to have external researchers and educators come into the NSF on a temporary basis. These individuals use their expertise to help ensure that the NSF continues to pursue high quality research.

Nearly 1/3 of NSF program officers are rotators, so oversight of this program is essential given the influence these nonpermanent government employees have on the NSF's overall mission. These researchers and educators are "on loan" from institutions that likely had, currently have, or will have grants from the NSF. It is paramount that caution is used to avoid even the appearance of impropriety or bias.

We should ensure that hard-earned tax dollars are being used appropriately. This is not the government's money, it's the people's money. This is even more troubling since the cost of an average rotator is \$36,000 more than the average permanent federal employee.

The costs associated with these rotators become difficult to justify when the Committee discovers that, as described in an Inspector General report from this month, one of these rotators inappropriately approved grants for her home institution.

These types of quid pro quo arrangements undermine the credibility of both the NSF's ability to properly manage the rotator program, as well as the institutions who seek grants from the NSF.

Conflicts of interest are serious matters and are typically dealt with severely. I know the incident described in the IG report took place before Dr. France Córdova became the Director of NSF. However, I am still concerned about the apparent lack of safeguards in place to ensure that this type of behavior does not continue in the future.

I hope the witnesses today will explain where the NSF's oversight procedures in place broke down and allowed this to occur.

I look forward to hearing about the Inspector General's recommendations for how to improve the oversight of this program and how to prevent this from occurring again in the future.

I also am interested to learn from the NSF what their timeline is for implementing these recommendations.

Unfortunately, if it becomes apparent that the NSF is not capable of handling this type of program, then maybe we should consider legislation that limits the use of rotators moving forward.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and I yield back.

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